



# Public Opinion in Iran

With Comparisons to American Public Opinion

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A WorldPublicOpinion.org Poll  
conducted in partnership with  
Search for Common Ground  
and  
Knowledge Networks

*WORLDPUBLICOPINION.ORG STAFF*

STEVEN KULL  
CLAY RAMSAY  
STEPHEN WEBER  
EVAN LEWIS  
EBRAHIM MOHSENI

*SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND STAFF*

AMB. (RET.) WILLIAM G. MILLER  
SONYA REINES



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AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

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Steven Kull and Clay Ramsay designed the questionnaire and wrote the analysis for this study, with contributions from William Miller, Stephen Weber, Evan Lewis, Ebrahim Mohseni, and Sonya Reines. Abe Medoff, Melanie Ciolek and Melinda Brouwer managed the editing and production of the report.

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## INTRODUCTION

The last year has been momentous for US-Iran relations, and indeed for Iran's relations with the world in general. There have been developments that have heightened tension and conflict, while others have relaxed them.

The year 2007 saw stronger and more frequent US claims that Iran is arming militia groups in Iraq. But it also saw the first high-level talks between the United States and Iran in almost 30 years—talks focused on the problem of Iraq's stability.

The United Nations Security Council imposed a second round of sanctions concerning Iran's nuclear program in early 2007 (and a third in early 2008). However, in December the US intelligence community issued a new National Intelligence Estimate, reversing its earlier assessments and stating that Iran closed down its program to develop nuclear weapons in 2003—a development widely read as reducing the likelihood of an American military strike against Iran's nuclear program.

In January 2007 WorldPublicOpinion.org and Search for Common Ground released the most extensive study of the Iranian public's attitudes on international issues conducted up to that time. A thousand randomly selected Iranian citizens were interviewed in every province in Iran and asked 134 substantive questions, mostly on Iran's foreign relations. This study laid a foundation that now makes it possible to see how Iranian public opinion may be evolving. The present study includes numerous trend questions—i.e., questions repeated to check for changes in attitudes—as well as new questions that deepen the knowledge gained earlier by probing further.

This study explored four broad areas of inquiry:

- Attitudes toward the United States, the West, and the wider world in general: Have Iranians grown more negatively or more positively inclined toward the United States and the West after the pressures of the last fifteen months? Would they support Iran and the United States taking steps to improve their relations?
- Attitudes toward Iran's nuclear program, both as a domestic project and as an international issue: The previous study found that a very large majority of Iranians support the nuclear energy program. Do they think that nuclear weapons are incompatible with Islam? Is there a deal with the international community that a majority of Iranians could support?
- Attitudes toward Iran's own government and society: In the United States there are ongoing controversies about how satisfied or dissatisfied Iranians are with their current government's performance; with their constitutional system, and the means of representation it affords; with human rights in Iran; and with the place of Islamic law in society. How do Iranians respond—not only to questions about their current government—but to much broader questions about what the principles of good governance should be?
- Attitudes toward Iran's place in the Middle East region: Iran is frequently described by outside observers as ambitious to become a regional hegemon; do the Iranian people have such aspirations? Do Iranians aspire to have a dominant role in relation to Iraq? Or would Iranians prefer for Iran to be part of a cooperative framework with other states?

The poll of Iranians was conducted with a randomly selected sample of 710 Iranian adults, from rural as well as urban areas, January 13—February 9, 2008. The margin of error is +/-3.8 percent.

Interviews were conducted in every province of Iran. Professional Iranian interviewers conducted face-to-face interviews in Iranian homes. Within each community, randomly selected for sampling, households were chosen according to international survey methods that are standard for face-to-face interviewing. In some cases, a respondent did not want to be interviewed because the interviewer was of the opposite sex. Interviewers then offered to either reschedule the interview for a time when the male head of household would be present, or to have an interviewer of the same sex visit.

The poll questionnaire was developed in consultation with experts on Iran as well as the Iranian polling firm.

In addition to the poll, focus groups were conducted in Tehran with representative samples of Iranians.

Americans were also polled for this study and asked parallel questions, especially about whether they would support steps to improve US-Iran relations; their views of the Iran nuclear issue and the prospects for accepting a deal; and Iraq, including talks with Iran’s government on Iraq.

In the United States, the poll of 703 nationally representative respondents was conducted January 18 – 27, 2008 and has a margin of error of +/- 3.8 percentage points. The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to [www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp).

Key findings of the study are:

**US-IRAN RELATIONS**

***1. Trends in Attitudes toward the United States, Americans, and Relations between Islam and the West***

While Iranian views of the United States continue to be quite negative, there are some signs of thawing of Iranian hostility and a slight majority now expresses a positive view of the American people. A growing majority believe that it is possible for Islam and the West to find common ground. However, despite the efforts of the Bush administration, there has been no reduction in the majority perception that the US is not committed to the goal of creating a Palestinian state .....8

***2. Steps for Improving US-Iran Relations***

Large majorities of Iranians favor numerous steps for improving US-Iranian relations, including direct intergovernmental talks on issues, greater access for each others’ journalists, more trade and greater cultural and people-to-people contacts. Large majorities also favor talks with the United States regarding Iraq. ....9

***3. Perceptions of US Threat***

Iranians continue to perceive the United States as a threat. The United States is widely perceived as seeking not only to assert control over the oil resources of the Middle East, but to weaken and divide the Islamic world and to purposely humiliate Muslims. A majority perceives US bases in the Middle East as a threat to Iran. These fears of the United States are intensified by the perception that the United States has extraordinary power over world events.....10

**4. National Intelligence Estimate and Perceived Likelihood of US Strikes**

A majority of Iranians are aware of the recent National Intelligence Estimate concluding that Iran is not seeking to develop nuclear weapons. This may have contributed to a decline in Iranian fears of a US military strike. .... 12

**5. US Public Perspectives on Relations with Iran**

Large majorities of Americans support numerous steps to improve relations with Iran, with very strong support for direct intergovernmental talks on issues. A large majority of Americans do not think it is a US goal to weaken and divide the Islamic world, and only one in four think that this should be a goal. Americans’ estimations of American power are far lower than those of Iranians. . 13

**THE NUCLEAR ISSUE**

**6. Producing Nuclear Fuel, Nuclear Weapons and the NPT**

Most Iranians insist that Iran should be able to produce nuclear fuel for energy production, but not nuclear weapons. Six in ten Iranians believe that producing nuclear weapons is contrary to Islam. Large majorities approve of Iran’s participation in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and support the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons. However, large majorities believe that there are countries secretly developing nuclear weapons, which may contribute to the desire to have the capacity to produce nuclear fuel ..... 14

**7. Possible Deal With UN Security Council**

A majority of Iranians and Americans would accept a deal with the UN Security Council whereby Iran would a limited right to produce nuclear fuel, provided that the IAEA has full and permanent access to ensure that Iran is not producing nuclear weapons. Support for such a deal exists despite a sharp drop in positive views of the United Nations--presumably due to pressure from the UN Security Council to stop enrichment—and to a lesser extent the IAEA..... 17

**8. US Public Perspectives on the Iran Nuclear Issue**

Large majorities of Americans approve of US participation in the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the NPT’s goal of eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons. A majority would accept a deal with the UN Security Council whereby Iran would have a limited right to produce nuclear fuel, provided that the IAEA has full and permanent access to ensure that Iran is not producing nuclear weapons. A majority of Americans misperceive the recent National Intelligence Estimate, believing wrongly it concluded that Iran has a nuclear weapons program today. Expectation of a future US military strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities has declined, but less so than in Iran ..... 17

**VIEWS OF IRANIAN SOCIETY AND ITS GOVERNMENT**

**9. Assessments of the Government**

Iranians largely express satisfaction with their government. Two out of three say that Iran is generally going in the right direction, though a plurality is dissatisfied with the Iranian economy. Half say they trust the government to do what is right most of the time, while another quarter say they trust it at least some of the time. Two-thirds express satisfaction with Iran’s relations with the world as a whole. Large majorities approve of how President Ahmadinejad is handling his job at home and his dealings with other countries, though this support is considerably lower among more educated and higher-income Iranians ..... 18

**10. The Will of the People and Governance**

A large majority agree that the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government and that the will of the people should have a high level of influence over government decisions. Iranians give their government fairly good ratings in terms of responsiveness to the people, but six in ten say that the influence of the people should be greater than it is.....21

**11. Iranian Electoral Process**

Eight in ten endorse the view that government leaders should be selected through general elections. Six in ten say they are satisfied with how members of Parliament and authorities in general are elected, but few are very satisfied.....22

**12. Press Freedom**

Iranians express conflicting views about freedom of the press. Two thirds say that it is important for the press to be able to publish news and ideas without government control, and eight in ten say that Iranians should be able to read publications from other countries. However, a plurality also says that the government should have the right to prevent the publication of things that are destabilizing and to regulate the internet. Asked to assess the level of press freedom, few say it has a lot of freedom, while a plurality says it has some freedom. A bare majority expresses satisfaction with the level of press freedom. ....22

**13. Women’s Rights**

Large majorities of Iranians endorse the principle that women should have equal rights with men and that over the course of their own lifetimes, women have gained greater rights. A large majority says that the government should act to prevent discrimination against women. A modest majority also supports the United Nations working to further women’s rights.....24

**14. Young Iranians, Views of Iranian Government and the United States**

A majority of young Iranians are supportive of the Iranian government and critical of the United States; however, the majorities holding these views are smaller than for older Iranians. Young people are a bit more supportive of press freedoms.....25

**15. Islamic Law**

Only a small minority wants to reduce the role of Shari’a in the way Iran is governed, but only one in three favor increasing its role. Only one in three favor punishing an Iranian who converts from Islam to another religion. The highest priorities in the application of Shari’a are preventing usury and providing welfare to the poor. Applying severe physical punishments is a low priority, but still endorsed by half .....26

**REGIONAL ISSUES**

**16. Iran’s Regional Role**

Just three in ten Iranians say that they want Iran to be the dominant power in the Persian Gulf, while half say that they want Iran to be part of a cooperative regional structure. As a general principle, about half of Iranians favor a cooperative approach in international relations. Most express satisfaction with Iran’s relations with its neighbors. ....27

**17. Iraq**

Only one in four Iranians say they want Iran to have major influence over Iraq, while half prefer Iran to be part of a cooperative regional structure to deal with Iraq. A slight majority opposes countries providing weapons to anti-US fighters in Iraq, but four in ten approve. Seven in ten favor Iran having talks with the United States over Iraq. A growing majority wants US troops out of Iraq within a matter of months. While a plurality views Iraq’s government as legitimate and have a favorable view of its president, these numbers have been diminishing ..... 28

**18. US Public Perspectives on Iraq**

Three in four Americans support talks with Iran over Iraq. Two thirds want US-led forces withdrawn according to a timeline of two years or less. A clear majority now thinks the current Iraqi government is not the legitimate representative of the Iraqi people, and a plurality views Prime Minister Maliki unfavorably..... 29

**INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

**19. Views of Countries**

Iranian views of Britain have worsened, approaching the level of negative views of the United States. Views of France have swung from leaning positive to leaning negative. Views of Russia have deteriorated but still lean positive. Views of China are quite positive. .... 30

**20. Views of the United Nations**

Views of the United Nations have become more negative, presumably in response to pressure from the UN Security Council. Nonetheless, majorities of Iranians favor a range of measures for giving the United Nations greater powers, including the right to enter countries to investigate human rights abuses. The new Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon receives moderately positive ratings ..... 31

**FINDINGS**

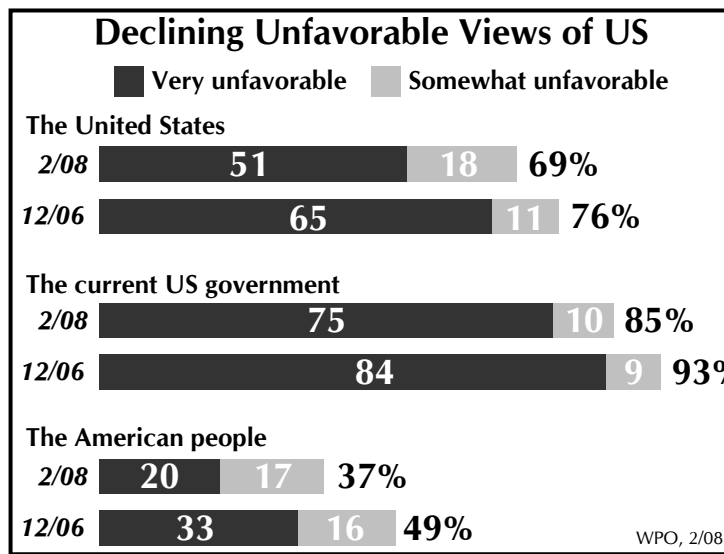
**US-IRAN RELATIONS**

***1. Trends in Attitudes toward the United States, Americans, and Relations between Islam and the West***

While Iranian views of the United States continue to be quite negative, there are some signs of thawing of Iranian hostility and a slight majority now expresses a positive view of the American people. A growing majority believe that it is possible for Islam and the West to find common ground. However, despite the efforts of the Bush administration, there has been no reduction in the majority perception that the US is not committed to the goal of creating a Palestinian state.

Iranians’ negative attitudes toward the United States are still strong, but show some signs of thawing. There have been meaningful declines in a number of measures that have shown hostile attitudes toward the United States.

While 69 percent of Iranians said they have an unfavorable view of the “the United States,” this number is down from 76 percent in December 2006. More significant, the percentage saying that they have a “very unfavorable” view dropped 14 points from 65 to 51 percent. Those with a favorable view, though, have not increased significantly—only from 22 to 24 percent.



There are also signs of a slight thaw in attitudes toward the current US government. Those with a very unfavorable view have declined nine points, from 84 percent at the end of 2006 to 75 percent. Those with a somewhat unfavorable view are stable at 10 percent; favorable views are only 8 percent (2% very). Asked whether the United States is having a positive or negative influence in the world, the same number—75 percent—said it is having a negative influence.

Mirroring this view of the US government, 72 percent of respondents said they had “no confidence at all” in President Bush “to do the right thing regarding world affairs.” Only 6 percent said they had some (4%) or a lot (2%) of confidence.

A slight majority of Iranians now express a positive view of the American people. Fifty-one percent are very (15%) or somewhat (36%) favorable toward the American people; up from late 2006 when 45 percent were very (9%) or somewhat (36%) favorable. Even more dramatic, those with an unfavorable view of the American people have declined 12 points from 49 percent to 37 percent, with almost all the decrease among the “very unfavorable” (33% down to 20%).

In the focus groups, participants repeatedly emphasized that they do not feel hostile to the American people, though they do not like the American government. As one man said, “Our primary problem is not with the people of America. Our problem is with the US government.”



Some portrayed the American people, like the Muslim people, as victims of the American government. In expressing his hostility toward the US government, another man said: “What I am saying is not directed toward the people of the US. They too are under the domination of their own government.” One even expressed the belief that the “American people are with us.”

While a clear majority of Iranians see US bases in the Middle East as a threat to Iran, the numbers thinking this have dropped from three in four down to a modest majority. In December 2006 73 percent called US bases in the Mideast a major (44%) or some (29%) threat to Iran; now 55% say that US bases are a major (29%) or some (26%) threat to Iran.

A growing majority believe that it is possible for Islam and the West to find common ground. When asked, “Thinking about Muslim and Western cultures, do you think that violent conflict between them is inevitable, or that it is possible to find common ground?” almost two thirds—64 percent—now say it is possible to find common ground (up from 58%). Equally significant, those thinking violent conflict is inevitable have declined by half, from 25 percent to just 12 percent.

Although the US government in 2007 renewed its activity of seeking a

peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, Iranians continue to believe that the United States is not committed to the goal of a Palestinian state. Seventy-eight percent said the United States is not very (16%) or not at all (62%) committed to “the goal of creating an independent and viable Palestinian state.” In December 2006 views were statistically identical.

### Relations Between Muslim World and West

Thinking about Muslim and Western cultures, do you think that violent conflict between them is inevitable, or that it is possible to find common ground?

Conflict inevitable

2/08  12%

12/06  25%

Possible to find common ground

2/08  64%

12/06  58%

WPO, 2/08

## 2. Steps for Improving US-Iran Relations

**Large majorities of Iranians favor numerous steps for improving US-Iranian relations, including direct intergovernmental talks on issues, greater access for each others’ journalists, more trade and greater cultural and people-to-people contacts. Large majorities also favor talks with the United States regarding Iraq.**

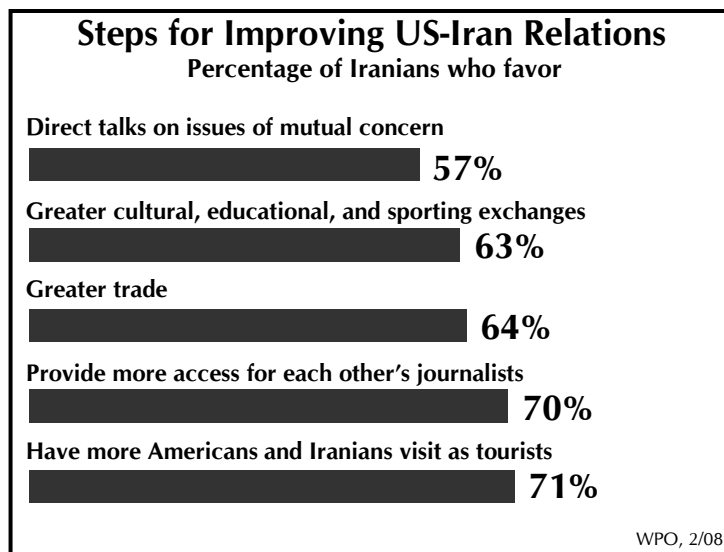
Iranians were asked a series of five questions about possible steps that could be taken to improve relations between Iran and the United States. Most steps were favored by large majorities.

Perhaps most significant, 57 percent favored the option of the Iranian and American governments having “direct talks on issues of mutual concern,” while only 26 percent were opposed. In a separate question an even larger percentage—69 percent—favored “having talks...on trying to stabilize the situation in Iraq,” with just 21 percent opposed.

Having greater trade between the countries was also favored by 64 percent (38% strongly).

A remarkably large 70 percent favored “providing more access for each others’ journalists,” with 37 percent favoring it strongly.

Cultural exchanges and people-to-people contacts were well regarded. The idea of “having greater cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges” was favored by 63 percent of Iranians (34% strongly). Having “more Americans and Iranians visit each others’ countries as tourists” was favored by 71 percent (45% strongly).



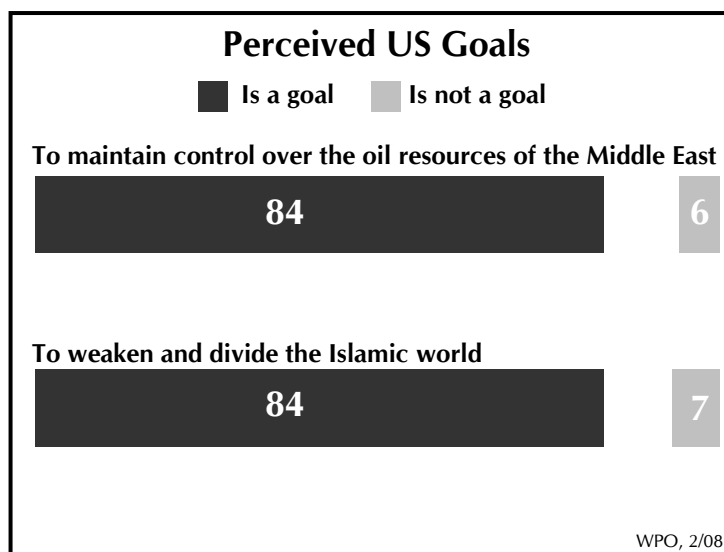
Support for these views appears to have increased substantially for all of these options. In December 2006 support ranged from 46 to 52 percent. However, in 2006 there was a very short preamble that was removed this time, so that the findings are not precisely parallel. Nonetheless, the wording of the five options was exactly the same, and it is likely that there has indeed been an increase in support.

In the focus groups a number of participants expressed optimism about the potential for greater Iranian-American amity. One commented as if speaking to the US government, “Another advice: Some years ago, US was somewhat liked by the Iranian people. ...I would like to [tell] them that you are not good politicians, because you are losing your standing among the Iranians. I would like to tell them that we are not a dangerous nation and that we could be good friends.”

### 3. Perceptions of US Threat

**Iranians continue to perceive the United States as a threat. The United States is widely perceived as seeking not only to assert control over the oil resources of the Middle East, but to weaken and divide the Islamic world and to purposely humiliate Muslims. A majority perceives US bases in the Middle East as a threat to Iran. These fears of the United States are intensified by the perception that the United States has extraordinary power over world events.**

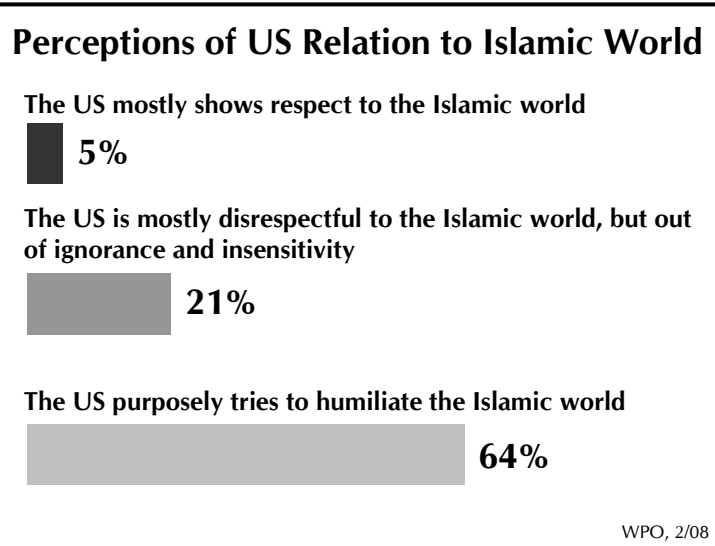
The United States is seen as pursuing goals hostile to Iran and to Islam in general. Eighty-four percent of Iranians think it is definitely (71%) or probably (13%) a US goal “to maintain control over the oil resources of the Middle East”; only 6 percent think it is not. In this, Iranians are similar to publics in four other Muslim countries WPO polled in 2007—Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia, and Pakistan--where majorities of 68 to 93 percent also see the United States as seeking to



control oil resources in the Middle East.

Further, and perhaps more significant, most Iranians assume that a goal of US policy is to weaken and divide the Islamic world. Eighty-four percent saw this as definitely (69%) or probably (15%) a US goal, as do Moroccans, Egyptians, Pakistanis and Indonesians (73 to 92%).

Iranians also perceive the United States as purposely seeking to humiliate the Islamic world. Respondents were asked which came closer to their own point of view: that “the US mostly shows respect to the Islamic world”; that it is “mostly disrespectful” to it, “but out of ignorance and insensitivity”; or that “the US purposely tries to humiliate the Islamic world.” About two in three—64 percent—saw the United States as purposely seeking to humiliate the Islamic world. Twenty-one percent thought the United States is disrespectful, but out of ignorance; and only 5 percent thought the United States mostly shows respect.



As mentioned above, a majority of Iranians (55%) perceive US bases in the Middle East as a threat to Iran. However, this number is down from December 2006, when 73 percent had this perception.

In the focus groups, participants gave abundant expression to the view that the United States uses its military power to coerce the world to submit to US domination. As one woman said, “[The US] attacks other countries and through fear and intimidation forces other countries to accept the US dominance...it wants to threaten other countries...Because it thinks that by threatening others, it can show them that the US is the most powerful.” Another said that all American presidents are “try[ing] to rule over the world.” A man said that the United States actively seeks to “threaten others and use extortion” so as to “show off” its power.

US military forces in the region were portrayed as a direct threat to Iran. As one man said, “In regards to US forces in the region...they are encircling the region just to convey to Iran that if you ‘misbehave,’ we are here.”

A woman expressed a desire for the United States to have a new president who would be less domineering. She said “I think the US right now needs someone like John F. Kennedy, to slowly put the US back on track...He wanted freedom and liberty for all nations, not just the US. Power and dominance was not that important to him.” However, another disagreed, saying, “Even then there were plans to and activities to expand US dominance.”

Perceptions of the United States as a threat to Islam and to Iran are intensified by the widely held perception that the United States has extraordinary power over world events. Asked in the poll, “How much of what happens in the world today would you say is controlled by the US,” 65 percent said “most” (32%) or “nearly all” (33%). Only 19 percent said “some” and 8 percent “very little.” Iranians share this perception with the publics of other Islamic countries.

In the focus groups, participants abundantly expressed such views. As one woman said, “I know that the US has technologically and militarily always been number one and it is because of this power that it can have an influence over everything, small or big.” Another said, “I feel that the US is behind most destructive acts and policies around the world.” A man said, “Whenever you see rioting, you can see the US pulling the strings.”

The United States was even seen as controlling al Qaeda. One man said, “Al Qaeda is an instrument of the US.” Another said, “The US has no problem with al Qaeda. Al Qaeda is playing the role that the US has sketched for it.” When pressed why the United States would want to support al Qaeda in promoting attacks on the United States, some explained that this would justify US presence in the region. Others said that, due to al Qaeda’s violence, it was an effort to make Islam look bad. One man simply made a categorical assertion, “If the US does something, like telling al Qaeda to distribute such videos [calling for attacks on Americans], which does not seem logical, that as well is part of the US’s grand scheme. And if the US seems to be having problems in Iraq, that too is part of the US’s grand scheme.”

The United States was portrayed as having limitless control over the media around the world, even controlling al Jazeera. This was seen as the sole cause of Iran’s negative image in the world. As one man explained, it is “because the US has money and can buy mass media...that they represent an unrealistic and false image of Iran.” Another said, “It is the US and its agents throughout the world ...the US either entices these groups to portray a negative image of Iran or blackmails them to do so.” Asked whether Iran’s image is “entirely due to America’s propaganda,” one person responded, “one hundred percent,” while another echoed, “It is completely the fault of the US.”

Interestingly, the one thing that the United States was seen as unable to control, despite its control over the media, is the people’s image of the United States. Asked, “If America buys the media to make Iran look bad, why couldn’t it buy media to make itself look good?” one man answered, “Because the image of the US is so bad that with no amount of money can it make itself look good. It’s just so obvious.”

#### ***4. National Intelligence Estimate and Perceived Likelihood of US Strikes***

**A majority of Iranians are aware of the recent National Intelligence Estimate concluding that Iran is not seeking to develop nuclear weapons. This may have contributed to a decline in Iranian fears of a US military strike.**

Iranians appear to be aware of the US National Intelligence Estimate, released in December 2007, which concluded that Iran stopped pursuing a nuclear weapons program in 2003. When told “As you may know, in the US there was recently a new report from all of the major intelligence agencies,” and asked what they thought its conclusion had been, 55 percent of Iranians correctly assumed it had said that Iran does not have a nuclear weapons program today. Only 19 percent assumed the opposite.

Iranian awareness of the conclusions of the NIE may have contributed to reduced anxieties about the prospect of a military strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities. Anxiety is lower than a year ago, and also lower among the better informed. While in 2006 48 percent of Iranians thought that such a strike in the next year or two was very (11%) or somewhat (37%) likely, now just 34 percent think such a strike is very (9%) or somewhat (25%) likely. A 54 percent majority now think a strike is not very (18%) or not at all (36%) likely.

Further, among those who were correct about the assessment of the NIE, a higher 61 percent think a strike unlikely—while among those mistaken about the NIE, 47 percent think it unlikely.

### 5. US Public Perspectives on Relations with Iran

**Large majorities of Americans support numerous steps to improve relations with Iran, with very strong support for direct intergovernmental talks on issues. A large majority of Americans do not think it is a US goal to weaken and divide the Islamic world, and only one in four think that this should be a goal. Americans' estimations of American power are far lower than those of Iranians.**

Large majorities of Americans supported most of the steps presented to improve relations with Iran. An overwhelming majority (82%) expressed support “for the governments to have direct talks on issues of mutual concern” (33% strongly). “Providing more access for each others’ journalists” was favored by 70 percent of Americans (21% strongly). A relatively modest majority (55%) favored “having greater trade” (12% strongly).

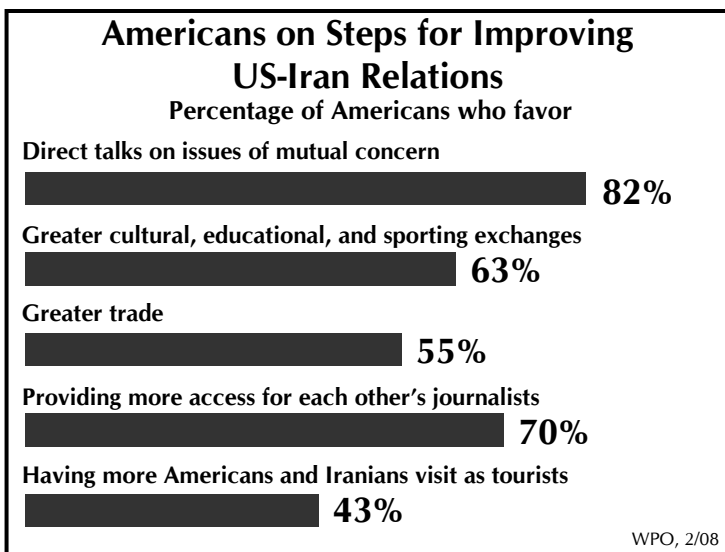
On the cultural side, “having greater cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges” was favored by 63 percent (20% strongly). However, on having “more Americans and Iranians visit each others’ countries as tourists,” Americans were more cautious, with 43 percent supporting more tourism (12% strongly) and 54 percent opposing it (20% strongly).

While American support for direct talks on issues and greater journalistic access remained stable since 2006, support for other steps have declined a bit, perhaps as an effect of the prolonged tension between the two countries. Support for more exchanges has declined by 9 points (72 to 63 percent); support for more trade has declined by 10 points (from 65% to 55%); and support for more tourism in both countries has declined 8 points (from 51% to 43%).

Contrary to Iranian perceptions, a large majority of Americans (62%) said that it is not a US goal “to weaken and divide the Islamic world,” while just one in three (32%) said it is a goal. Only one in four (25%) thought that it should be a goal, while 66 percent said it should not.

Also contrary to Iranian perceptions, a large majority of 65 percent saw the United States as at least somewhat committed “to the goal of creating an independent and viable Palestinian state” (very, 17%), and this majority has risen 10 points since December 2006, presumably in response to recent administration efforts.

As might be expected, Americans do not recognize themselves in the portrait of American power painted by the Iranian public. A majority thinks the United States has at most some control, but no more, over what happens in the world today (12% very little control, 56% some control).



## THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

### **6. Producing Nuclear Fuel, Nuclear Weapons and the NPT**

**Most Iranians insist that Iran should be able to produce nuclear fuel for energy production, but not nuclear weapons. Six in ten Iranians believe that producing nuclear weapons is contrary to Islam. Large majorities approve of Iran's participation in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and support the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons. However, large majorities believe that there are countries secretly developing nuclear weapons, which may contribute to the desire to have the capacity to produce nuclear fuel.**

Very large majorities of Iranians insist that Iran should be able to produce nuclear fuel. Eighty-one percent say that it is "very important" for "Iran to have a full-fuel-cycle nuclear program" which would give Iran the capacity to produce nuclear fuel for energy production. Another 9 percent say it is somewhat important, and just 4 percent say it is not very important or not important at all.

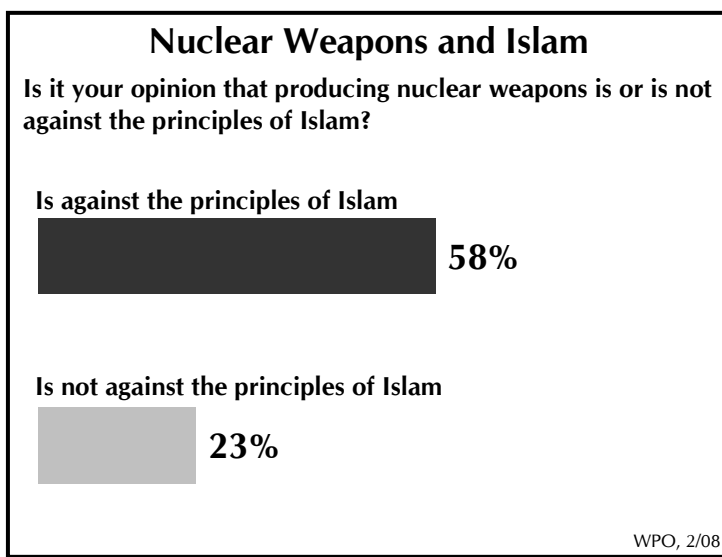
However, in a number of questions Iranians indicate that they are not intent on having nuclear weapons. Fifty-eight percent said that producing nuclear weapons is contrary to Islam, with only 23 percent saying that Islam does not prohibit the production of nuclear weapons.

These sentiments were expressed in the focus groups. As one man said, "We do not want nuclear weapons because we are Muslim and pursuit of nuclear weapons is prohibited in Islam." Another said, "We are an Islamic country and that is why we will never pursue nuclear weapons, even if we are attacked by one." Another said, "We have no need for nuclear weapons...Because most certainly the Iranians are the children of Prophet Mohammad and his message always was peace for all humanity. Iran will defend itself but, unlike its enemies, will never do so through cruel techniques." Others echoed a broader normative aversion to nuclear weapons. One woman said, "Unlike Americans, I believe Iranians and Iranian scientists are civilized enough not to make use of this technology to annihilate humans." Another said, "Deep down inside, we do not even wish to think about such things. Nuclear weapons are so inhumane that it sickens us when we think about it."

A large majority in the poll endorsed their government's position on nuclear energy. Told that their government's position is for Iran to have "a full fuel cycle nuclear energy program" but not develop nuclear weapons, 66 percent endorse the policy, while 20 percent said Iran should develop nuclear weapons and 5 percent that Iran should not pursue a full fuel cycle program.

A majority of Iranians also endorse the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (or NPT) that prohibits Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Iranians were told:

As you may know, Iran and most of the world's countries have signed a treaty called the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty or NPT. According to this treaty, the countries that have



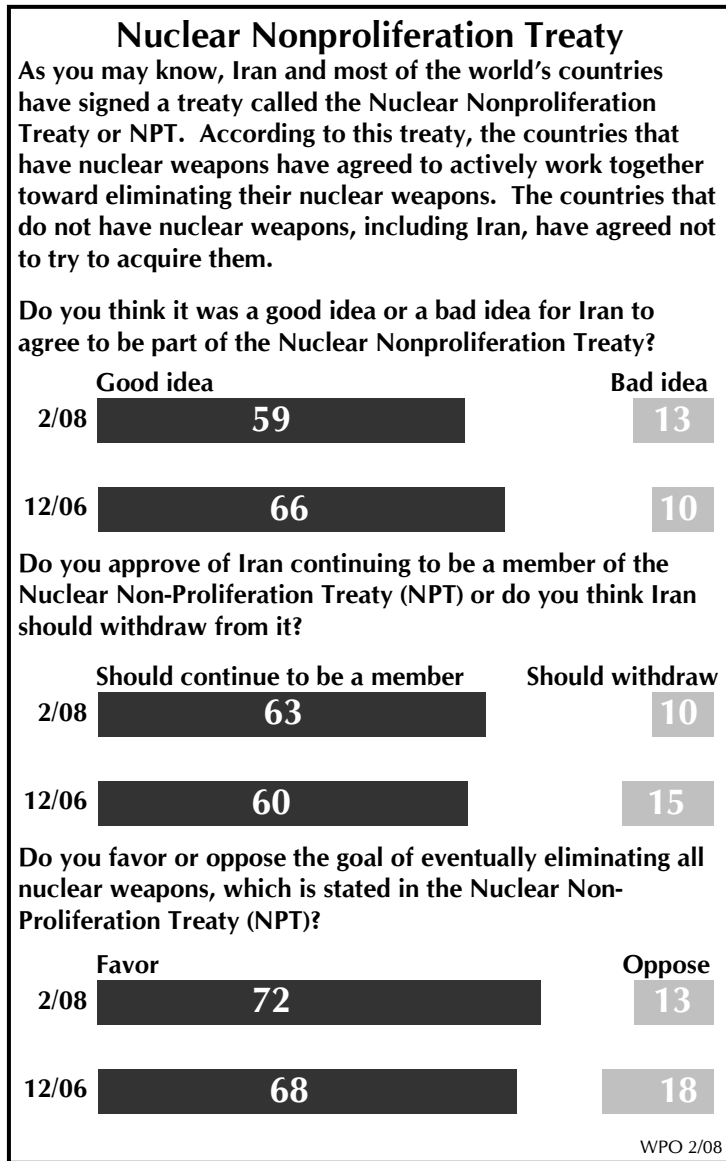
nuclear weapons have agreed to actively work together toward eliminating their nuclear weapons. The countries that do not have nuclear weapons, including Iran, have agreed not to try to acquire them.

They were then asked whether it was a good idea or a bad idea for Iran to be part of the NPT—59 percent said it was a good idea (down from 66% in 2006), while 13 percent said it was a bad idea. They were also asked whether Iran should continue to be part of the NPT and 63 percent said that it should (up from 60% in 2006), while 10 percent said it should withdraw from the treaty.

An even larger number—72 percent—said that they approve of the goal of all countries eliminating nuclear weapons, which is stated in the NPT treaty (up from 68%).

While supporting the NPT treaty, Iranians express strong doubts that it will succeed indefinitely in preventing new countries from acquiring nuclear weapons. Asked, “How many countries do you think have secret programs for developing the capacity to produce nuclear weapons?” which would be contrary to the terms of the NPT treaty, a mere 3 percent say none. Three quarters believe that there are countries secretly developing nuclear weapons. Estimates vary from a few (24%), to some (28%), to many (24%).

This belief that the NPT regime is precarious appears to be contributing to Iranians’ desire to have the capacity to produce nuclear fuel. In the focus groups respondents insisted that Iran should have the scientific knowledge that would give them the capacity to develop nuclear weapons should it become necessary in the future. Here are three examples:



Interviewer: So, you think Iran shouldn’t build nuclear weapons?  
 Respondent: If need be, it should be able to produce one.  
 I: Is it needed?  
 R: I do not think we are under such a magnitude of threat today.

I: Do you think that Iran is trying to acquire nuclear weapons?

R: Making nuclear weapons takes a long time. At the moment, the most the Iranian government might be doing is to gain more knowledge about it. .. Iran does not currently need a nuclear weapon.

R: [Iran] cannot allow [itself] to be left unarmed when the whole world arms itself. I think if the threats against us are elevated, then the government might decide to go full speed ahead, but not now.

There was also recognition that developing nuclear energy is a step toward developing nuclear weapons. Thus some participants would resist making the categorical statement that Iran should not develop nuclear weapons. But when given a chance to elaborate, they would generally clarify that they did not favor building weapons now, but that at some point in the future it may become necessary. This is consistent with the finding in the poll that many believe some countries are developing nuclear weapons contrary to the NPT, and thus the NPT could effectively fall apart.

R: We have no need for nuclear weapons. But we can have very complete knowledge of an issue, but not put it into action.... So we could never make use of nuclear weapons. But nuclear energy is a whole different story and it has many benefits for us.

I: So you want to have nuclear energy and you want to have the ability to make nuclear weapons, but not make them? ...

R: Well, if we know how to make nuclear energy we would also know how nuclear weapons are built too. I don't know, but I am sure that Iran would never make use of nuclear weapons, even for defensive purposes...but there is strategic value in having this know-how. Whether it decides to use it or not, that is another issue. We might end up using it if we are forced.

Some respondents would flatly say that Iran should develop nuclear weapons. However, when given the opportunity to amplify, it became clear that this position was contingent on the assumption that more countries would move in that direction. For example, when asked whether Iran should develop nuclear weapons, one woman answered:

R: Yes, yes. Because the world is going toward such weapons. In the near future, nuclear weapons are going to replace conventional weapons... Soon, nuclear weapons are going to be part of all wars and Iran should be ready for that day...But there is no war going on right now. All I am saying is that it should be ready. Such weapons are for when we are threatened with such weapons.

At another point she fully endorsed having UN inspectors to assure that Iran was not developing nuclear weapons and recognized that this seemed inconsistent with her support for developing nuclear weapons, joking that "Well, this is exactly why the whole world is confused."

This helps illuminate how in the February 2008 Terror Free Tomorrow poll of Iranians, when asked whether Iran should develop nuclear weapons, 52 percent said that it should-- even though in response to other questions majorities oppose developing nuclear weapons. Apparently some Iranians have what appear to be contradictory views. But the same respondent can say that Iran should take the next steps toward developing nuclear weapons by developing the capacity, while also saying that they oppose actually crossing the line and making nuclear weapons, unless there are some significant changes in the strategic environment that make them necessary.



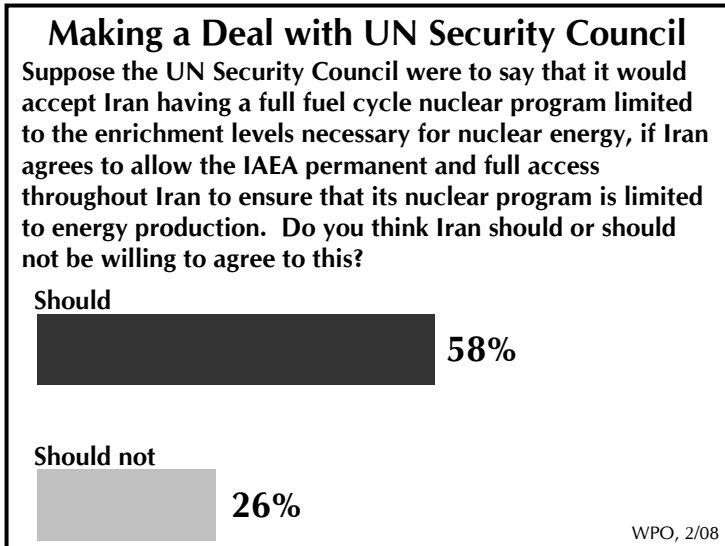
### *7. Possible Deal With UN Security Council*

A majority of Iranians and Americans would accept a deal with the UN Security Council whereby Iran would a limited right to produce nuclear fuel, provided that the IAEA has full and permanent access to ensure that Iran is not producing nuclear weapons. Support for such a deal exists despite a sharp drop in positive views of the United Nations--presumably due to pressure from the UN Security Council to stop enrichment—and to a lesser extent the IAEA.

A majority of Iranians appear to be interested in a deal with the UN Security Council.

Respondents were presented a possible deal whereby Iran would have a limited right to produce nuclear fuel, provided that the IAEA has full and permanent access to ensure that Iran is not producing nuclear weapons [see box]. Fifty-eight percent said they supported such a deal, with just 26 percent opposed.

In a recently released poll conducted for the BBC World Service, this deal was also endorsed in 17 out of 31 countries polled, including by 55 percent of Americans, 71 percent of the British and 56 percent of the French. Ten countries were opposed and four divided.



Recent pressure on Iran in the UN Security Council may have diminished support for the United Nations among the Iranian public. While in December 2006 58 percent said that the United Nations has a positive influence in the world, in the current poll this number has dropped sharply to 33 percent. However, only 25 percent said the United Nations is having a negative influence.

Views of the IAEA have also slipped, but less so. While in December 2006 54 percent had a positive view of the IAEA, now 44 percent have such a positive view. Only 15 percent have a negative view.

### *8. US Public Perspectives on the Iran Nuclear Issue*

**Large majorities of Americans approve of US participation in the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the NPT's goal of eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons. A majority would accept a deal with the UN Security Council whereby Iran would have a limited right to produce nuclear fuel, provided that the IAEA has full and permanent access to ensure that Iran is not producing nuclear weapons. A majority of Americans misperceive the recent National Intelligence Estimate, believing wrongly it concluded that Iran has a nuclear weapons program today. Expectation of a future US military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities has declined, but less so than in Iran.**

Americans show even greater support for the NPT than do Iranians. Asked whether it was a good or bad idea for the United States to agree to be part of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in a November 2006 WPO poll, 78 percent said it was a good idea and only 15 percent thought it a bad idea.

In the same study, 82 percent favored the goal stated in the NPT of eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons, with 14 percent opposed. A more recent poll (WPO September 2007) found a somewhat smaller majority of 69 percent in favor with 28 percent opposed. Other trendline data indicates that Americans may have become a bit more wary of eliminating nuclear weapons in recent years, perhaps because US officials have repeatedly accused Iran of secretly trying to develop a nuclear weapons capability.

Americans (like Iranians) tend to think that other countries are pursuing secret programs toward developing nuclear weapons. In a December 2006 WPO poll 72 percent thought “some” (36%) or “many” (36%) countries had such secret programs. When PIPA asked respondents in 2004 to offer their best guess of how many countries had such secret programs, the median answer was 10.

A majority of Americans would accept a deal with the UN Security Council whereby Iran would have a limited right to produce nuclear fuel, provided that the IAEA has full and permanent access to ensure that Iran is not producing nuclear weapons. Fifty-five percent said in January 2008 that “If Iran were to allow UN inspectors permanent and full access throughout Iran, to make sure it is not developing nuclear weapons,” Iran should “be allowed to produce nuclear fuel for producing electricity,” while 38 percent rejected this deal (BBC/GlobeScan/PIPA). An earlier, longer version of this question—which included the counter-argument that “Iran should not be allowed to enrich uranium at all, because doing so would put them in a strong position if they later decide to violate the agreement and build nuclear weapons”—nonetheless received 55 percent approval for such a deal (November 2006, PIPA/Knowledge Networks).

Americans’ positive views of the IAEA seem to have declined slightly. In a September 2007 WPO poll, 54 percent said the “IAEA is having a mainly positive influence in the world”—down from 58 percent in December 2006. (Iranians’ positive views of the IAEA have dropped ten points in the same period, to a 44 percent plurality.)

Asked about the National Intelligence Estimate only 35 percent of Americans correctly answered that it concluded that today Iran does not have a nuclear weapons program. Fifty-four percent assumed that it concluded Iran does have such a program.

Expectations of a future US military strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities have nonetheless declined slightly. While 49 percent in December 2006 thought that it was somewhat or very likely, now 45 percent see such a strike as somewhat (36%) or very (9%) likely.

## **VIEWS OF IRANIAN SOCIETY AND ITS GOVERNMENT**

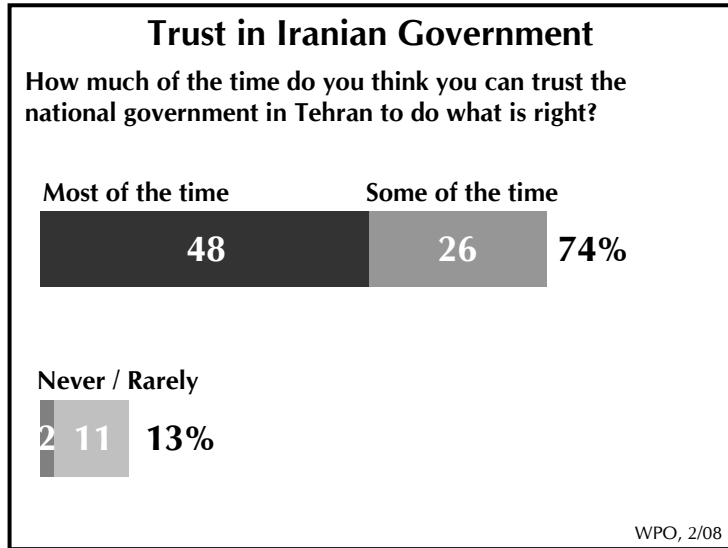
### ***9. Assessments of the Government***

**Iranians largely express satisfaction with their government. Two out of three say that Iran is generally going in the right direction, though a plurality is dissatisfied with the Iranian economy. Half say they trust the government to do what is right most of the time, while another quarter say they trust it at least some of the time. Two-thirds express satisfaction with Iran’s relations with the world as a whole. Large majorities approve of how President Ahmadinejad is handling his job at home and his dealings with other countries, though this support is considerably lower among more educated and higher-income Iranians.**

About two thirds of Iranians make positive assessments of Iran’s government and general direction. Asked, “Generally speaking, do you think things in Iran today are going in the right direction or...the wrong direction?” 65 percent say things are moving in the right direction, while 24 percent disagree.

However, Iranians make an exception about the economy. A 49 percent plurality said they were “mostly dissatisfied with Iran’s economy,” while 36 percent said they were mostly satisfied.

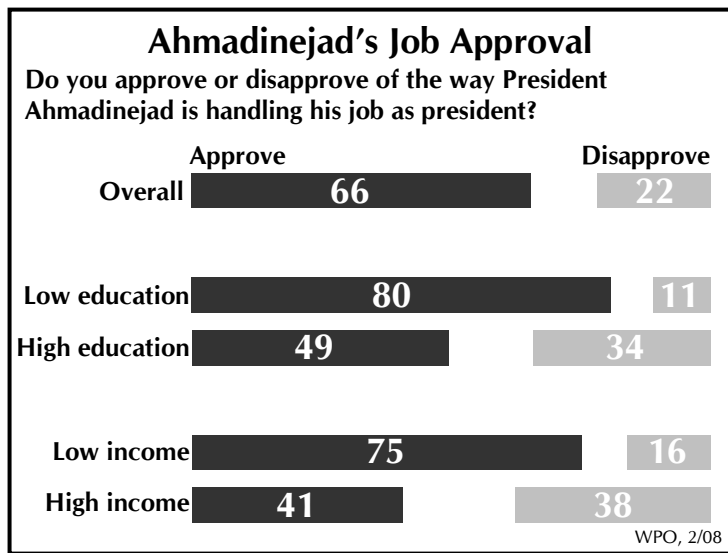
Three in four Iranians say that they trust the government to do what is right at least some of the time. Respondents were asked how much of the time they “trust the national government in Tehran to do what is right.” Forty-eight percent said the government could be trusted most of the time, and another 26 percent said it could be trusted some of the time. Just 14 percent answered “rarely” (11%) or “never” (2%).



In foreign relations, two-thirds (64%) said they are mostly satisfied with Iran’s relations with the world as a whole; 28 percent said they were mostly dissatisfied.

Two thirds also approve of how President Ahmadinejad is handling his job at home and his dealings with other countries. Sixty-six percent approved “of the way President Ahmadinejad is handling his job as president,” while 22 percent disapproved. To probe deeper into these sentiments of support, the study asked questions about “the way President Ahmadinejad has been traveling abroad and speaking about Iran’s foreign policy.” Sixty-three percent said the president’s activities have made “the overall security of Iran” “mostly better”; only 14 percent said this has made Iran’s security mostly worse. Similarly, 64 percent said Ahmadinejad’s activities had made “other countries’ views of Iran” mostly better; 16 percent said his work had made these countries’ views worse.

Support for Ahmadinejad is stronger among those with low income and low education, and considerably weaker at the upper end of each scale. Among low-income respondents, 75 percent approved of Ahmadinejad’s performance; among high-income respondents, it was 41 percent, with 38 percent disapproving. Among those with less than a high school education, 80 percent approved of Ahmadinejad; among those with some college or more, it was 49 percent, with 35 percent disapproving. These differences suggest that the remarks of many observers, to the effect that Ahmadinejad operates as the Iranian version of a “populist,” are not far off the mark.



In the focus groups some noted that there are those in the West who believe that Iranians do not support their government. This was viewed with some annoyance and rejected. As one man said:

There is a widespread propaganda in the media that the Iranians don't like their own government. But I would like to tell them that it is not like that at all. We love our government and officials. We have chosen them ourselves and we do not need others to tell us how to make decisions. In the last presidential elections, a little less than 70% of the eligible voters took part... This level of participation does not even happen in the US. Don't you think that this signals our trust and love for our political system? Don't you think that when we take part in the elections we are signaling our support of the government?

The notion that the Guardian Council should screen candidates was also largely endorsed. For example a woman said:

Candidates must meet some qualification...We even have illiterate peasants coming to Tehran to run for the presidency with the silly goal of maintaining the price of potatoes. We've got beggars and unemployed signing up to become candidates to better their own lot, and this is simply not acceptable.

Another woman emphasized that the Guardian Council's "members are indirectly chosen by the people." She said that she had confidence in them "because they too have been chosen by the people. It is the people who ultimately make the decision in Iranian elections."

Another expressed some reservations along with a general acceptance:

Of course it happens in every country that an individual who is not well liked ends up in high office. But at the end of the day, since we have voted in favor of our constitution, even if sometimes the constitutional system fails in the screening process, we should not denounce the whole system. We have chosen this constitutional system and it is also under the supervision of our leader, in whom we confidence.

Views were mixed about Ahmadinejad. One person said, "He works really hard for the people.. he is courageous." Another said, "I do not deny his shortcomings but as far as his foreign policy goes, I think he has been able to make things better."

On the other hand there were complaints about how hard he has pushed the nuclear issue:

As compared to now, I think at the time of President Khatami, Iran was much more stable. The policies of Ahmadinejad have been too radical. During the times of president Khatami much research was done on nuclear energy, but Ahmadinejad... I think he should have proceeded with more caution and less speed. He just went full speed ahead. His radical stances have placed lots of strains on Iran.

Another agreed, saying: "I think he made it worse. Because unlike Khatami he stood so firm that others placed sanctions on us." But then another countered:

I totally disagree. President Khatami was not even successful internally... And as far foreign policy and Iran's nuclear program was concerned, President Khatami continuously bowed to the pressures and only conceded, without getting absolutely anything in return.

**10. The Will of the People and Governance**

A large majority agree that the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government and that the will of the people should have a high level of influence over government decisions. Iranians give their government fairly good ratings in terms of responsiveness to the people, but six in ten say that the influence of the people should be greater than it is.

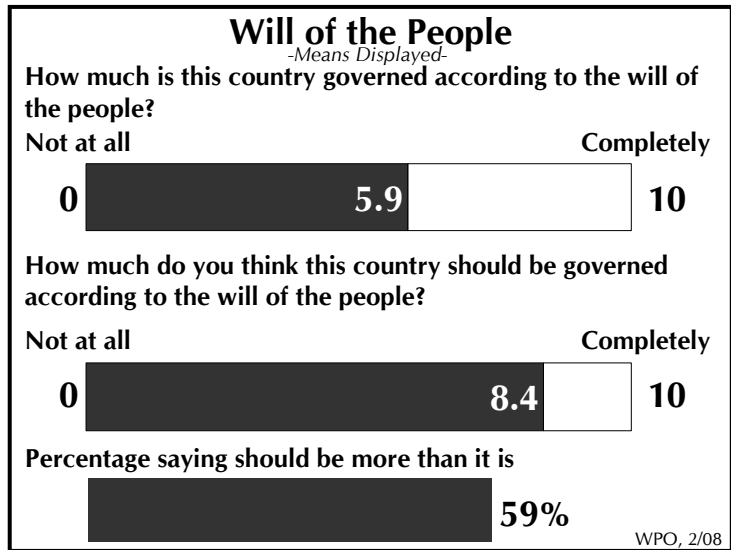
Two in three Iranians endorse the fundamental principle—drawn from the language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—that “the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government.” Presented with that statement, 66 percent said they agreed (41% strongly); only 9 percent disagreed (2% strongly).

Iranians also believe by a large margin that the influence of the public should not be limited to periodic elections. Asked, “Do you think elections are the only time when the views of the people should have influence, or that also between elections leaders should consider the views of the people as they make decisions?” only 14 percent saw elections as the only time when the people’s views should have influence. Two in three (68 percent) said that between elections as well, leaders should consider the people’s views.

Iranians give their government fairly good ratings in terms of responsiveness to the people, but six in ten say that the influence of the people should be greater than it is. Respondents were asked: “How much is this country governed according to the will of the people?” and told to answer on a 0-to-10 scale with 0 meaning “not at all” and 10 meaning “completely.” The average response was a modestly positive 5.9. Fourteen percent gave a low response (0-3); 36 percent gave a middle response (4-6); and 38 percent gave a high response (7-10).

Respondents were then asked, “Using the same scale, how much do you think this country should be governed according to the will of the people?” The average response was a higher 8.4. Seventy percent gave a number between 7 and 10.

A majority indicated that they thought the government should be more responsive to the will of the people than it is. Comparing the assessment of the government’s responsiveness to the preferred level, 59 percent said it should be higher than it is. Only 14 percent gave the same number each time, indicating they approved of the current degree of responsiveness; and 10 percent gave a lower number.



### ***11. Iranian Electoral Process***

**Eight in ten endorse the view that government leaders should be selected through general elections. Six in ten say they are satisfied with how members of Parliament and authorities in general are elected, but few are very satisfied.**

Iranians embrace the broad principle of selecting their leaders through universal suffrage. Asked, “As a general rule, do you think government leaders should be selected through elections in which all citizens can vote, or selected some other way?” 80 percent said leaders should be chosen in elections. Only 6 percent said leaders should be selected in some other way.

Six in ten respondents said they are satisfied with how members of Parliament are elected, but few are very satisfied. Members of Parliament must win in general elections; however, the Guardian Council must approve all candidates and a substantial portion are rejected. Fifty-eight percent expressed satisfaction with the process by which members of the parliament (Majlis) are elected. However, only 18 percent said they were very satisfied while 40 percent said they were somewhat satisfied. Thirty-two percent expressed dissatisfaction, with 21 percent not very satisfied and 11 percent not satisfied at all.

To explore attitudes about how leaders, in general, elected directly or indirectly, respondents were asked how satisfied respondents were with the way “authorities are elected in this country.” Respondents’ attitudes were similar to attitudes about the selection of members of Parliament. Sixty-two percent expressed satisfaction, but only 18 percent were very satisfied. Twenty-eight percent expressed low levels of satisfaction (not very 21%, not at all 7%).

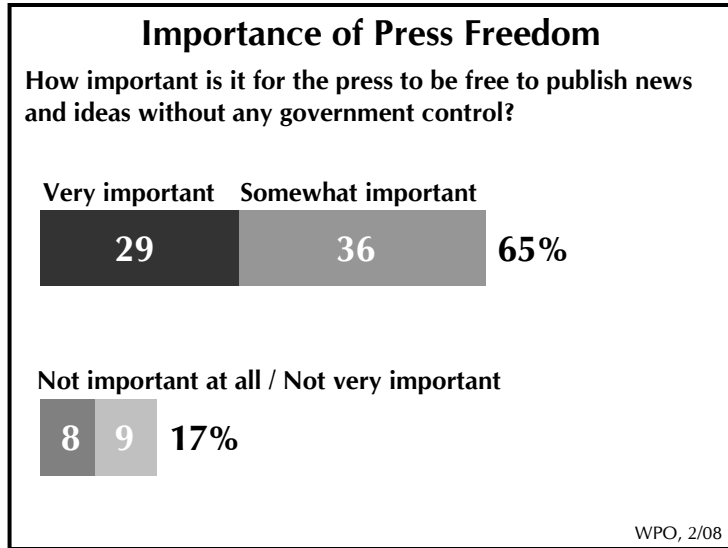
Moderate satisfaction with the democratic process was also expressed in WPO’s December 2006 poll. In that study respondents were asked: “How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed by representatives elected by the people?” They were told to answer on a scale where 1 means it is “not at all important” and 10 means “absolutely important.” On average, Iranians gave a response of 9.1; a large majority (68%) gave a score of 10.

Respondents were then asked to rate how much their country is “governed by representatives elected by the people” on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 means “not at all” and 10 means “completely”). Iranians gave their country an average score of 6.9, with seven percent of Iranians giving their country a score of 3 or less, 27 percent a score between 4 and 6 and 61 percent a score of 7 or higher. Only 9 percent said that their country was “governed completely” by elected representatives.

### ***12. Press Freedom***

**Iranians express conflicting views about freedom of the press. Two thirds say that it is important for the press to be able to publish news and ideas without government control, and eight in ten say that Iranians should be able to read publications from other countries. However, a plurality also says that the government should have the right to prevent the publication of things that are destabilizing and to regulate the internet. Asked to assess the level of press freedom, few say it has a lot of freedom, while a plurality says it has some freedom. A bare majority expresses satisfaction with the level of press freedom.**

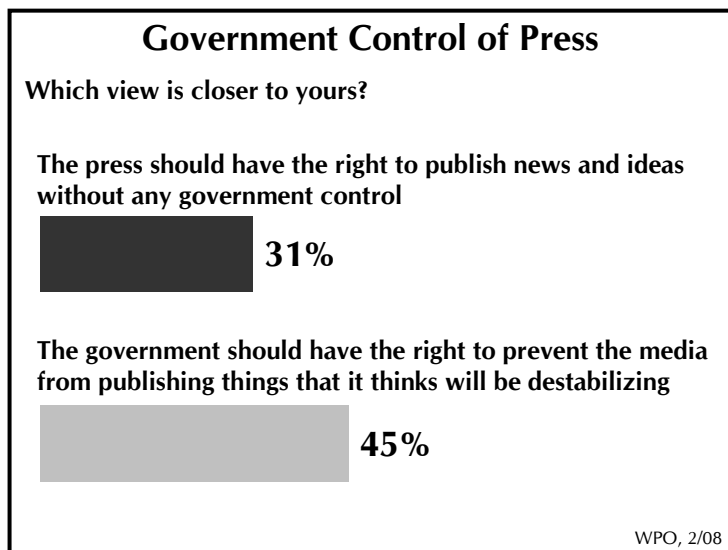
Iranians express complex and seemingly contradictory views of press freedom. When asked about the general principle of press freedom, large majorities express support. Asked how important it is for the press be “free to publish news and ideas without any government control,” two thirds (65%) said it is important (29% very, 36% somewhat). Only 17 percent saw it as unimportant (not very important 9%, not important at all 8%).



An even larger majority thinks Iranians should have full freedom to read materials from other countries.

Asked, “Do you think people in Iran should have the right to read publications from all other countries?” four out of five (79%) said Iranians should have this right. Only 6 percent disagreed.

However, in a question where conflicting arguments were presented, including one that warned about the potential for political instability, a plurality opted for government control. Forty-five percent endorsed the view that “The government should have the right to prevent the press from publishing things that it thinks will be destabilizing.” Just 35 percent chose the view that “The press should have the right to publish news and ideas without any government control.”



A similar plurality did not endorse full freedom of access to the internet.

Presented two options, 44 percent opted for the position that “the government should have the right to prevent people from having access to some things on the internet,” while 32 percent opted for the position that “people in Iran should have the right to read whatever is on the internet.”

Asked to assess how much freedom the press does have in Iran, respondents gave moderate ratings. Fewer than one in five (17%) described their media as having “a lot of freedom.” But just 21 percent thought the media has either not very much freedom (16%) or none at all (5%). The plurality (45%) said the media has “some” freedom.

A bare majority expresses satisfaction with the current level of press freedom. Asked how much freedom the press should have, 52 percent said it should have the same amount of freedom (43%) or less (9%). One in three (34%) said it should more freedom, and another 14 percent did not answer.

In the focus groups the mix of views on freedom of access to media was portrayed in an exchange between two women:

Woman 1: I believe that each individual has to have the freedom to choose whether to watch or hear these things. For example I myself like to listen to all types of music because I like to be exposed to the culture of other countries and if we didn't have access to the music or the culture of other countries then we would just stay stable and traditional forever and we'd never improve and get to know the culture of other countries.

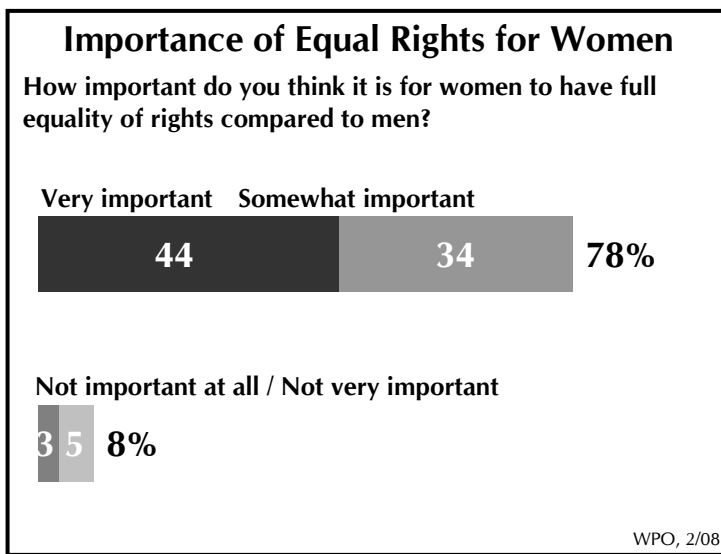
Woman 2: I also agree on having the freedom to choose, but what I'm trying to say here is that there are things that should be exposed to people gradually, but not all of a sudden, so that people would have the chance to get to know it, because otherwise they would have a sudden bad effect on people's culture, because they would not have the capacity to accept it and get along with it.

### 13. Women's Rights

**Large majorities of Iranians endorse the principle that women should have equal rights with men and that over the course of their own lifetimes, women have gained greater rights. A large majority says that the government should act to prevent discrimination against women. A modest majority also supports the United Nations working to further women's rights.**

Three out of four Iranians say it is important for "women to have full equality of rights compared to men," with 44 percent saying this is very important. Very few (8%) said this was "not very important" or "not important at all."

Most perceive that women have gained greater rights. Respondents were asked to think back over the course of their own lifetimes and say whether, "compared to the rights men have in this society," women now have more equality or not. Seventy-five percent said they thought women had more equality today (39% "much more," 36% "a little more").



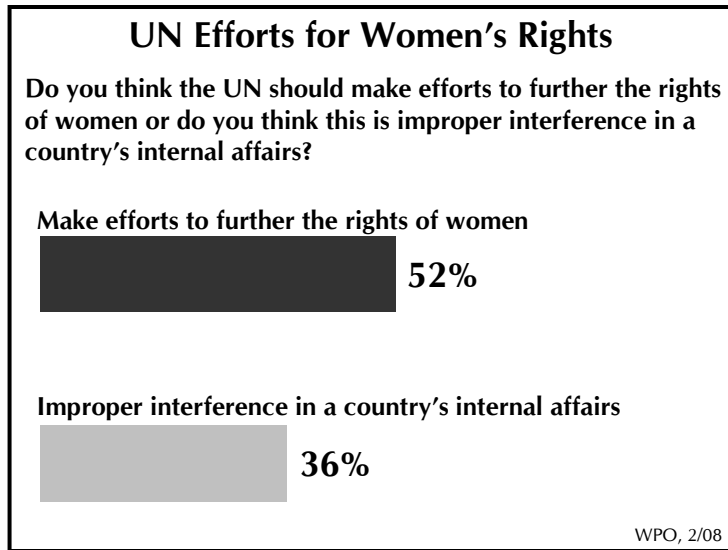
Most Iranians believe that the government has a responsibility to counteract discrimination against women. Asked, "Do you think the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women, or that the government should not be involved in this kind of thing?" 70 percent said government should make such an effort, and only 18 percent said government should not be involved.

Those who said that government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women were then asked, "Do you think the government is doing enough to prevent discrimination...or do you think it should do more?" The larger number (36% of the full sample) said the government should be doing more than it is, while a quarter (of the full sample) thought the government is doing enough.



A modest majority supports the United Nations working to further women's rights—even when given a counterargument implying that this could be intrusive for Iran. Asked whether “the UN should make efforts to further the rights of women, or do you think this is improper interference in a country's internal affairs?” Fifty-two percent supported the UN taking such a role, while 36 percent saw it as a form of interference.

Interestingly, differences between men and women on these questions were quite modest. The number of men and women saying that that women should have full equality were statistically the same, though the percentage saying this is very important was higher among women (51%) than men (38%). While men and women are largely the same in perceiving that women have gained greater equality, 46 percent of men as compared to 33 percent of women thought women have gained much greater equality. Thirty-nine percent of women and 33 percent of men thought the government should make greater efforts against discrimination. There was no meaningful difference between men and women in their support for the United Nations playing a role to further women's rights.



#### ***14. Young Iranians' Views of Iranian Government and the United States***

**A majority of young Iranians are supportive of the Iranian government and critical of the United States; however, the majorities holding these views are smaller than for older Iranians. Young people are a bit more supportive of press freedoms.**

Based on anecdotal evidence, some visitors to Iran have made the case that Iranian young people are quite dissatisfied with their government and are pro-American. Comparing the views of 18-24 year olds in the present survey to those of older Iranians, this view is not borne out. However, on a variety of questions the majorities that are supportive of the government and critical of the United States are a bit smaller among young people, as compared to older Iranians.

While large majorities of young Iranians say that they trust the government, their level of trust is significantly lower than that of older people. Asked “How much of the time do you think you can trust the national government in Tehran to do what is right?” 72 percent of young Iranians said they trust it most or some of the time. However, the number saying that they trust it most of the time (36%) is significantly lower than it is for older age groups. Among those 45 and older, 61 percent say they trust the government most of the time.

Approval for current conditions in Iran is a bit lower among young people. The majority of young people saying that Iran is going in the right direction (57%) is smaller than it is among those 45 and older (73%). The majority of young Iranians who say that they approve of President Ahmadinejad (60%) is smaller than the majority among those 45 and older (73%).

Young people are more supportive of press freedom. While majorities of all Iranian age groups say that it is important for the media to publish news and ideas without government control, the majorities

are larger among young people and they feel more strongly: 58 percent of those 45 and older say that press freedom is very important (23%) or somewhat important (35%), while among those 18-24, 72 percent say it is very (35%) or somewhat (37%) important. Young people are also more apt to say that the media should have more freedom—39 percent as compared to 25 percent among those 45 and older. While among those 45 and older 51 percent say that the government should have the right to prevent publishing things it thinks will be destabilizing, as compared to 21 percent who say that the media should have the right to publish without government control, among those 18-24 views are evenly divided.

Young people's views of the United States, while predominantly negative, are a bit less negative than for older Iranians. While 75 percent of those 45 and older have an unfavorable view of the United States (18% favorable), among 18-14 year olds 63 percent have an unfavorable view (29%). Views of the US government and the American people are not, however, significantly different.

### ***15. Islamic Law***

**Only a small minority wants to reduce the role of Shari'a in the way Iran is governed, but only one in three favor increasing its role. Only one in three favor punishing an Iranian who converts from Islam to another religion. The highest priorities in the application of Shari'a are preventing usury and providing welfare to the poor. Applying severe physical punishments is a low priority, but still endorsed by half.**

When asked whether "Shari'a should play a larger role, a smaller role, or about the same role as it plays today" in the way Iran is governed, only 14 percent wanted Shari'a to play a smaller role. However, only a third wanted it to play a larger role (34%). Nearly half preferred to hold the status quo on Shari'a (45%).

Only one in three Iranians favor punishing an Iranian Muslim who converts to another religion. Asked, "Do you think that the government should or should not punish an Iranian citizen who converts from Islam to a non-Muslim religion?" 32 percent said the government should, while 50 percent said it should not.

Respondents who said, in the question discussed above, that Shari'a should play either the same or a larger role in Iranian governance—79 percent of the whole sample--were presented six aspects of the application of Shari'a and asked for each, "how important is [this] for the government to do?"

The highest priorities in the application of Shari'a are preventing usury and providing welfare to the poor. A 51 percent majority (of the full sample) called "preventing usury" very important, and another 16 percent said it was somewhat important. Nearly as many (48%) said "providing welfare to the poor" was very important, and another 20 percent said it was somewhat important. Forty-six percent also said "making education and healthcare available to all" was very important in applying Shari'a (somewhat: 22%).

Anti-vice aspects of Shari'a also received high ratings. Highest was "punishing those who consume alcoholic beverages in public" (45% very important, 22% somewhat), followed by "policing moral behavior such as gambling and prostitution" (43% very important, 22% somewhat).

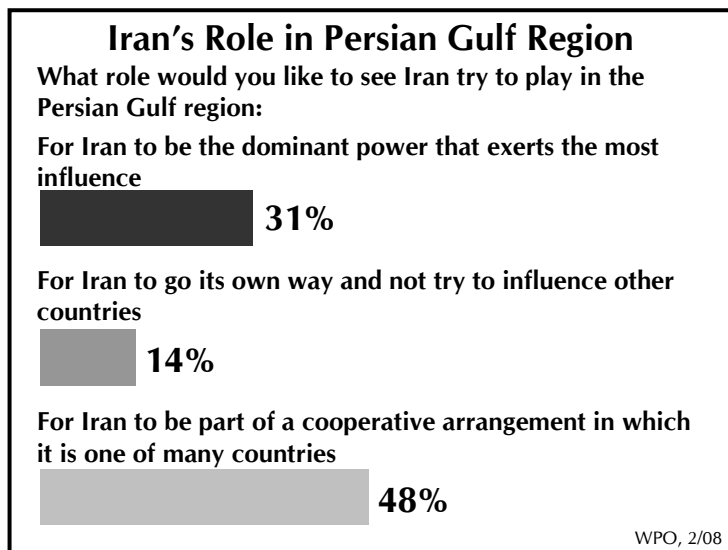
The lowest priority was assigned to "applying severe physical punishments to people convicted of certain crimes." Only 22 percent called this very important (28% somewhat important). Overall, though, severe physical punishments were still endorsed by half.

## REGIONAL ISSUES

*16. Iran's Regional Role*

**Just three in ten Iranians say that they want Iran to be the dominant power in the Persian Gulf, while half say that they want Iran to be part of a cooperative regional structure. As a general principle, about half of Iranians favor a cooperative approach in international relations. Most express satisfaction with Iran's relations with its neighbors.**

There is no majority interest among Iranians in having Iran attempt to become the region's dominant player. Respondents were asked "what role would you like to see Iran try to play in the Persian Gulf region" and offered three choices. [See box] Only 31 percent wanted Iran to be the dominant power. At the same time even fewer—14 percent—wanted Iran to go its own way and not try to influence other countries. The most popular position—endorsed by nearly half (48%)—was for Iran to be part of a cooperative arrangement.



As a general principle, Iranians are divided on whether Iran should emphasize its own interests or seek more collective objectives. Respondents were offered two general principles and asked to choose which one is more important for Iran's foreign policy. The first principle was that "Iran should use its power and influence in the way that best serves Iran's interests and values." The second was that "Iran should coordinate its power and influence together with other countries according to shared ideas of what is best for the world as a whole." The response was divided, with 42 percent choosing the first, interests-driven approach and 45 percent the second, cooperative approach.

Comparing how respondents answered these two questions throws additional light on their underlying values. Among the three in ten who wanted Iran to be dominant in its region, a 58 percent majority of this group chose the interests-driven approach. Among the half who would like to see Iran be part of a cooperative regional structure, a 55 percent majority preferred the cooperative approach. And among the 14 percent who preferred that Iran not try to influence other countries at all, a 56 percent majority preferred the cooperative approach to the interests-driven approach. Thus--among the majority of Iranians who are uninterested in seeking regional dominance--more tend to prefer a cooperative approach in international relations.

A large majority of Iranians say they are "mostly satisfied" with Iran's relations with neighboring countries. Seventy-four percent expressed this view, and only 18 percent said they were mostly dissatisfied with Iran's regional relations.

This positive view of Iran's relations with its neighbors may seem at odds with a commonly expressed assumption that ordinary Iranians have negative views of their immediate neighbors and of Sunni Muslims in general. While such comments probably circulate in Iran, questions asked in Terror Free Tomorrow's February 2008 study do not bear out this anecdotal picture. TFT asked

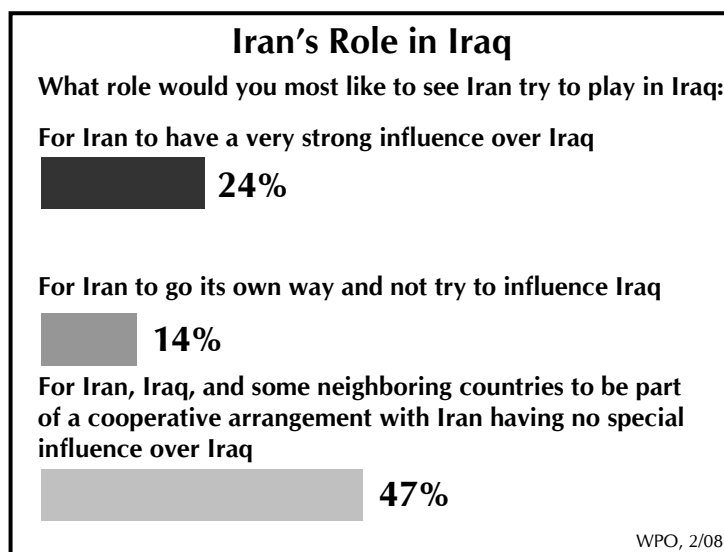
respondents whether they had favorable or unfavorable opinions of various countries and peoples. Fifty-eight percent said they had a favorable view of Saudi Arabia (very, 22%), while just 24 percent were unfavorable. Fifty-six percent had a favorable view of Arabs, while 22 percent did not. More broadly, 76 percent viewed Sunni Muslims favorably (32% very), while just 5 percent viewed them unfavorably.

Iran’s northwestern neighbor Turkey was also viewed positively by a large majority—66 percent (30 percent very favorable). Thirteen percent were unfavorable toward Turkey. Asked about Turks as a “group of people,” a statistically identical 65 percent were favorable toward them.

### 17. Iraq

**Only one in four Iranians say they want Iran to have major influence over Iraq, while half prefer Iran to be part of a cooperative regional structure to deal with Iraq. A slight majority opposes countries providing weapons to anti-US fighters in Iraq, but four in ten approve. Seven in ten favor Iran having talks with the United States over Iraq. A growing majority wants US troops out of Iraq within a matter of months. While a plurality views Iraq’s government as legitimate and have a favorable view of its president, these numbers have been diminishing.**

The idea of Iran becoming a dominant force in Iraq’s internal affairs has little traction in the Iranian public. Respondents were asked “what role would you most like to see Iran try to play in Iraq” and offered three alternatives. Only 24 percent wanted “for Iran to have a very strong influence over Iraq.” A plurality of 47 percent chose instead “for Iran, Iraq, and some neighboring countries to be part of a cooperative arrangement, with Iran having no special influence over Iraq.” Another 19 percent wanted even less involvement, preferring “for Iran to go its own way and not try to influence Iraq.”



A slight majority opposes countries providing weapons to anti-US fighters in Iraq. Respondents were asked whether “it would be a good idea or a bad idea for Iraq’s neighbors to provide weapons to Iraqis fighting US forces in Iraq.” Fifty-one percent viewed such military aid to insurgents as a bad idea, but a substantial four in ten (39%) supported it. However, TFT in February 2008 found 59 percent supported “the government of Iran providing support to...Iraqi Shiite militias”, with 33 percent opposed. Nonetheless, 52 percent were willing for Iranian diplomats to offer—as part of an agreement to normalize relations with the United States—“ending Iranian support for any armed group inside Iraq” (32% opposed such a deal).

A large majority support Iran having talks with the United States “on trying to stabilize the situation in Iraq.” Sixty-nine percent approved of such talks, while only 21 percent disapproved. Similarly,

TFT in February 2008 found 71 percent saying they would favor “the government of Iran working with the United States to help resolve the Iraq war,” with 21 percent opposed.

A growing majority wants US troops out of Iraq in a matter of months. Sixty-four percent said the “US-led forces in Iraq” should all be withdrawn in six months—up from 58 percent in December 2006. Just 15 percent said US-led forces should only be reduced “as the security situation improves in Iraq”—down from 23 percent in 2006. Small and essentially unchanged numbers preferred a withdrawal over a one-year timeline (7%) or a two-year timeline (3%).

A plurality sees the government in Iraq as legitimate—down from a modest majority in 2006. Asked whether “the current government is...the legitimate representative of the Iraqi people,” 45 percent said that it is, while 33 percent said that it is not. This is down from December 2006, when 54 percent thought it was legitimate (31% thought it was not).

Similarly, 45 percent have a favorable view of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki while 22 percent have an unfavorable view. This too has drifted down slightly from 2006, when 48 percent had a favorable view.

More popular is Shi’a opposition figure Muqtada al-Sadr, who was viewed favorably by 56 percent and unfavorably by just 12 percent. Similarly, in 2006 58 percent had a favorable view and 12 percent were unfavorable.

### ***18. US Public Perspectives on Iraq***

**Three in four Americans support talks with Iran over Iraq. Two thirds want US-led forces withdrawn according to a timeline of two years or less. A clear majority now thinks the current Iraqi government is not the legitimate representative of the Iraqi people, and a plurality views Prime Minister Maliki unfavorably.**

Like Iranians, a large majority of Americans approve of talks between the two countries over the problem of stabilizing Iraq: 73 percent of Americans approve of these talks, while just 22 percent disapprove.

Americans are not as eager to have US forces withdraw from Iraq as are Iranians, but only one in three (32%) Americans support an open-ended commitment. Sixty-five percent favor withdrawal according to a time-line of either six months (19%), one year (30%), or two years (16%). This is up from 2006, when 58 percent favored a timeline—six months (18%), one year (25%), two years (15%).

A majority now thinks the current Iraqi government is not the legitimate representative of the Iraqi people. In December 2006 a 48 percent plurality felt the Iraqi government was not legitimately representative; in the current study 55 percent held this view. Those seeing the Iraqi government as representative have declined from 42 percent to 36 percent.

Americans lean toward an unfavorable view of Prime Minister Maliki.. Fifty percent reported a somewhat (39%) or very (11%) unfavorable view of Maliki, while 30 percent had a somewhat (29%) or very (1%) favorable view. This is statistically unchanged from 2006.

## INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

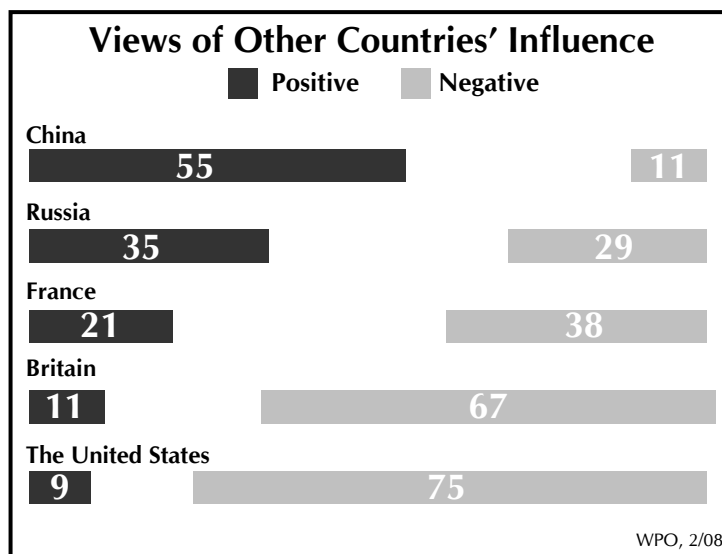
**19. Views of Countries**

**Iranian views of Britain have worsened, approaching the level of negative views of the United States. Views of France have swung from leaning positive to leaning negative. Views of Russia have deteriorated but still lean positive. Views of China are quite positive.**

In the current study and earlier in 2006, Iranians were asked whether several leading countries were having “a mainly positive or mainly negative influence in the world.” For some of these countries, the findings allow us a window on how Iranians’ picture of the outer world has evolved over the last year or so.

Iranians’ views of Britain are nearly as negative as their views of the United States, and have grown more negative over the last year. A full two-thirds (67%) said Britain was having a mainly negative influence in the world—up from 60 percent. The number with a positive view declined by half, from 21 percent to 11 percent.

These views of Britain approach the levels of negativity toward the United States. Seventy-five percent said that the United States is having a negative influence and only 9 percent called it a positive influence.



Views of France have gone from leaning positive to leaning negative. Those describing France’s influence as positive have dropped by half, from 42 percent to 21 percent. However, those with a negative view are essentially the same number as in 2006, moving from 36 to 38 percent.

Views of Russia have deteriorated but still lean positive. Those seeing Russia as a positive influence have declined from 44 to 35 percent, but those declaring it a negative influence are also fewer, having gone from 35 to 29 percent. (Those volunteering “it depends” grew from 8% to 16%.)

China (asked about for the first time) is viewed quite positively. A 55 percent majority sees China’s influence in the world as mainly positive, and only 11 percent call it mainly negative (depends: 12%).

Iranians were also asked the same question about Iran itself. Seventy-nine percent said that Iran is a positive influence in the world (negative: 5%). There was no significant change from 2006.

## 20. Views of the United Nations

Views of the United Nations have become more negative, presumably in response to pressure from the UN Security Council. Nonetheless, majorities of Iranians favor a range of measures for giving the United Nations greater powers, including the right to enter countries to investigate human rights abuses. The new Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon receives moderately positive ratings.

Favorable views among Iranians of the United Nations' influence in the world have fallen sharply since late 2006—from 58 percent to 33 percent, a remarkable 25-point drop. However, those saying that the United Nations is a “a mainly negative influence” have remained at one in four (25%, compared with 24% in 2006). More said “it depends;” 17 percent as compared to 9 percent in 2006.

Attitudes toward the International Atomic Energy Agency show a roughly similar pattern, though less strong. Those seeing the IAEA as a mainly positive influence have dropped to 44 percent from 54 percent in 2006. But those calling the IAEA a negative influence have increased only to 15 percent from 10 percent earlier.

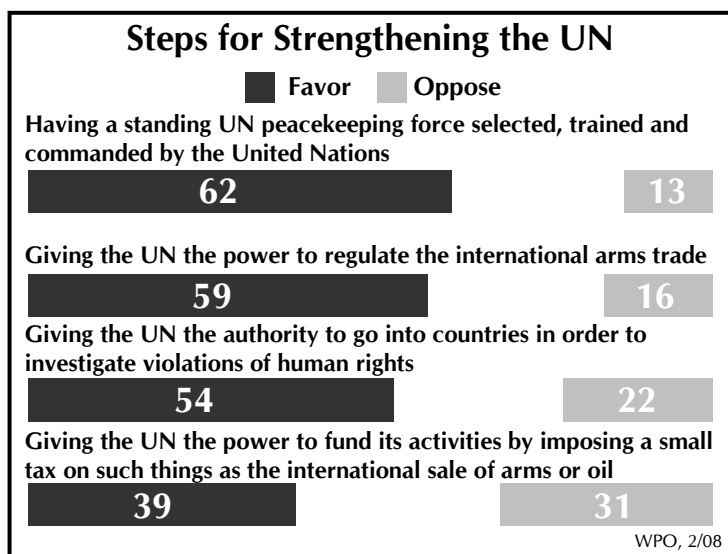
Despite the cooling toward the United Nations, majorities of Iranians favor a range of measures that would give it greater powers. Respondents were asked to evaluate a series of possible “steps that could be taken to strengthen the United Nations.”

Perhaps most significant, 54 percent favored “giving the UN the authority to go into countries in order to investigate violations of human rights”; only 22 percent opposed this idea.

Two ideas received even higher levels of support. Sixty-two percent favored “having a standing UN peacekeeping force selected, trained and commanded by the UN,” with only 13 percent opposed. Similarly, 59 percent supported “giving the UN the power to regulate the international arms trade,” with 16 percent opposed.

A narrow plurality even favored the idea of “giving the UN the power to fund its activities by imposing a tax on such things as the international sale of arms or oil”: 39 percent supported this idea, with 31 percent opposed (30 percent did not provide an answer).

A substantial majority also said that UN has the responsibility to protect populations in some cases. Respondents were told: “Some say the UN Security Council has the responsibility to authorize the use of force to protect people from severe human rights violations such as genocide, even against the will of their own government. Others say the UN Security Council doesn't have this responsibility.” A 59 percent majority said the UN Security Council did have this responsibility, while only a quarter (25%) said it did not.



The new Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon receives moderately positive ratings. A 43 percent plurality said they had either a lot (5%) or some (38%) confidence in Ban Ki-Moon “to do the right thing regarding world affairs.” Eighteen percent said they had “not too much” (10%) or no (8%) confidence in him.





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THE PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL POLICY ATTITUDES  
1779 MASSACHUSETTS AVE. NW, SUITE 510,  
WASHINGTON, DC 20036  
PHONE: 202-232-7500, FAX: 202-232-1159  
INFO@PIPA.ORG  
[HTTP://WWW.WORLDPUBLICOPINION.ORG](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org)

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND  
1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20009  
PHONE: (202) 265-4300, FAX: (202) 232-6718  
[HTTP://WWW.SFCG.ORG/](http://www.sfcg.org/)